

Maximising the benefits of PrEP: The potential of community pharmacy

We believe that expansion of PrEP should be a key intervention including in the Government's upcoming HIV Action Plan. We would like to see the urgent initiation of a fully funded pilot that tests the "real life" availability of PrEP via primary care including community pharmacies – ensuring a service that is joined up with other local HIV prevention efforts.

The end of new HIV transmissions is in sight

In 2019 the UK Government committed to ending new cases of HIV by 2030 – an ambitious but achievable target. In December 2020, the HIV Commission published their final report which set out a blueprint for ending HIV transmission by 2030¹. The Commission highlighted that a key priority to ending new HIV transmission is to extend the provision of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) in settings beyond sexual health clinics.

The potential of PrEP

HIV PrEP is a proven highly effective method of preventing HIV infection. After a large scale trial in England, it is now available via level-3 sexual health services for anyone at risk of HIV. Public Health England (PHE)* are clear that the availability of PrEP, alongside other HIV combination prevention tools, has been a factor in the incredible reductions in HIV cases seen in England – particularly in gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men. PrEP has the potential to also be a valuable HIV prevention tool for other communities at risk of HIV – but this opportunity is not yet being realised. PrEP is still largely an HIV prevention intervention used by gay and bisexual men. Women and Black African communities are among those at risk of HIV but reportedly less likely to access sexual health services.

The potential of community pharmacy

Primary care including community pharmacists are well placed to support the expansion of PrEP to other communities who could benefit from it. Community pharmacists are at the frontline of healthcare, and are also taking on more clinical roles such as the management and monitoring of long term conditions^{2,3}. They already provide sexual

1. [HIV Commission final report, 2020](#)

2. [Hypertension Case-Finding Service](#)

3. [Hepatitis C testing service](#)

*Now known as UKHSA, PHE at the time of publication



health prevention and treatment services and advice such as Emergency Hormone Contraception (EHC), chlamydia screening, signposting and referral.

The way ahead

These benefits and the prevention experience that already exists in pharmacies places them and their teams in a unique position for successful integration into PrEP care pathways to increase access to anyone that can benefit from PrEP.

As national community pharmacy and HIV organisations we want to further explore this potential. We believe that the expansion of PrEP access should be a key intervention in the upcoming National HIV Action Plan.

As a next step, we would like to see a timely, fully funded pilot that tests the "real life" availability of PrEP via pharmacies (and other settings) and allows for lessons learnt and successful approaches to be quickly scaled up. This should see PrEP remain exempt from a prescription charge and ensure a service that is fully joined up with other local HIV prevention efforts. The pilot should include a diversity of areas in England – both rural and urban – and covering different local demographic communities. The pilot should also incorporate a PrEP awareness campaign that is culturally appropriate and that challenges stigma around and misinformation about PrEP.